



# ONE IN THREE: Dating ~~violence~~ an Epidemic

**The relationship does not excuse the behavior — it DOES determine the risk**

KELLY FOREMAN | PROGRAM COORDINATOR  
PHOTOS BY JIM ROBERTSON

**S**cared and frail, with eyes soggy and bloodshot from heavy tears, cheeks purple and puffy from the last blow, she looks to you for answers. Between sobs, she holds her breath waiting to hear you say she will be safe. He won't hurt her anymore. She just wants the pain to stop; for him to leave her alone.

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You respond to a woman's desperate cry that her home has been burglarized. Her bedroom torn apart, her cell phone lies on the night stand where the burglar — her boyfriend — went through it looking for information. She feels violated, scared to stay alone in her home, worried he will return.

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Maybe you've seen her 15 times — each time for the same reason. Every Saturday night he drinks too much and she calls 911 for help. You keep telling her to leave him. Each time she stays. >>



>> They're not bound by marriage vows, so why do victims stay in abusive dating relationships? Why do they fight against the arrest of their partners? Don't they want help?

What they don't want is to become another statistic. Especially when statistics show that leaving an abusive relationship increases the likelihood the victim will be killed by a disturbing 75 percent, said Dina Bartlett, legal consultant for the Mary Byron Project.

It's a statistic Bartlett and her co-workers are reminded of every day in their fight against domestic violence crimes. Mary Byron, a 21-year-old Louisville native was shot and killed by her former boyfriend in 1993. Byron's boyfriend killed her after he was released from jail — unbeknownst to Byron — where he had been serving a sentence for raping, stalking and assaulting her. The Mary Byron Project was established in 2000 in its namesake's memory and led to the creation of automated crime victim notification.

Contrary to traditional thought, the fact that dating victims aren't legally bound to the relationship doesn't always make

it easier to separate from their abusers, Bartlett said. More importantly, it also doesn't decrease the risk victims face of life-threatening violence.

"Thirty percent of all female homicide victims are killed by their intimate partners," Bartlett continued. "The primary reasons men give for killing their intimate partners are possessiveness, jealousy and fear of the end of the relationship. Officers need to understand that if she goes back, it's not because she necessarily wants to reconcile with him, it's because she's scared he will kill her.

"Whether or not you live with somebody doesn't determine your risk," Bartlett continued. "It's the relationship that determines your risk. The risk of

physical injury or death is still the same for dating partners as it is for a married couple."

#### UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Obviously not all abusive dating relationships end in homicide, but the long-lasting effects on survivors can be devastating. Victims often experience enduring symptoms of depression and anxiety. They are more likely to engage in unhealthy behavior like drug activity, exhibit antisocial behavior and consider suicide, among a long list of resulting issues provided by the Center for Disease Control's Division of Violence Prevention.

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Equally as troubling is evidence that shows those at the highest risk of dating violence are young women between the ages of 16 and 24. Statistics from [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org) — a website powered by the National Domestic Violence Hotline — show that the rate of intimate partner violence in that age range almost triples the national average for victims of other genders and age ranges. Regarding the abusers, [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org) also reports that the first signs of violent behavior often surface in batterers ranging from 12 to 18 years old.

"This is such a mine field for teenagers," said Teri Faragher, director of Lexington's Domestic Violence Prevention Board. "They are just developing their own self-concept; they're figuring out how intimate relationships work and figuring out their own boundaries. Our society gives the message that someone being very attentive and passionate and intense, that these are positive qualities in a relationship. We name perfumes after these things. They're at the beginning of wanting someone to love them, to think they're really cool and special.

"But these are the very things that can be warning signs," Faragher continued.

"They aren't always, but they can be warning signs that the intensity, passion and attention are going to turn into control, pathological jealousy, isolating intensity and power over the other person. So what at first feels really good to someone who has not had a lot of relationship experience, down the road they begin to say, 'Oh my god, I'm trapped. He's hurting me now, and he's going to hurt me more if I try to get out of this. What do I do?'"

While much attention necessarily is focused on younger women, Faragher urged officers to be aware that a growing number of victims are older women who may be entering the dating pool following a divorce or loss of a spouse.

"People date through life at this point," she said. "The difference with these women is, when you start dating in your 60s, you start getting a little more — maybe desperate is the word — to find a partner to age with. You feel like your time is limited for finding that partner. So, maybe you're a little more willing to forgive characteristics that could be indicators of potentially abusive behavior in the future. Maybe you're a little more willing to overlook that at the

beginning. It's a really important issue for people of all ages. Men AND women."

Once a person has been victimized, they are at a higher risk for repeat victimization later in life, according to the CDC. Abusers also are more likely to repeat abusive behavior with multiple women over their lifetimes if there is no early intervention. Break the Cycle, a national agency that provides comprehensive dating abuse prevention programs, reports that one in three women will be the victim of dating violence in their lifetimes. Bartlett said statistics show that only five percent of men are batterers.

"So if you take 100 women, 33 of them will be victims, and in 100 men, only five of them are going to be perpetrators," Bartlett said. "So each perpetrator has six or seven victims. We see it all the time in court."

#### A MISSING LINK

Domestic violence is a complex issue, and a couple involved in an abusive dating relationship who are not married, do not live together and have no children in common fall into their own, unique category under Kentucky law. >>



## Dating violence by the Numbers

**1.5 Million** the number of high school students nationwide who experience physical abuse from a dating partner in a single year

**16 to 24** the age of young women who experience the highest rate of intimate-partner violence

**81** percent of parents who believe teen dating violence is not an issue, or admit they don't know if it is an issue

**50** percent of dating violence victims who attempt suicide, compared to 12.5 percent of non-abused girls and 5.4 percent of non-abused boys

**1,000** percent increase of likelihood for children who witness domestic violence to become batterers

**30** percent of female homicide victims who are killed by their intimate partner

**72** percent of ninth graders who are dating

**22** percent of female adult victims of rape, physical violence and/or stalking who experienced some form of partner violence between 11 and 17 years of age. Fifteen percent of male victims also experienced partner violence during their teenage years

**80+** percent of high school counselors who report feeling unprepared to address incidents of abuse on their school campuses



What Does

# Dating Violence

Look Like?

- **Physical Abuse:** Any intentional use of physical force with the intent to cause fear or injury, like hitting, shoving, biting, strangling, kicking or using a weapon
- **Verbal or Emotional Abuse:** Non-physical behaviors such as threats, insults, constant monitoring, humiliation, intimidation, isolation or stalking
- **Sexual Abuse:** Any action that impacts a person's ability to control sexual activity or the circumstances in which sexual activity occurs, including rape, coercion or restricting access to birth control
- **Digital Abuse:** Use of technologies and/or social media networking to intimidate, harass or threaten a current or ex-dating partner. This could include demanding passwords, checking cell phones, cyber bullying, sexting, excessive or threatening texts or stalking on Facebook or other social media.
- If you or a loved one is in a violent relationship, please get help. Visit [loveisrespect](http://www.loveisrespect.org/) for more information, chat with a peer advocate online, call (866) 331-9474 or text "loveis" to 22522.

— from *Breakthecycle.org*

For dating violence materials that can be printed and distributed free of charge, visit <http://www.loveisrespect.org/download-materials>

Scan this QR code with your smart phone to listen to a teen dating violence victim tell her story of survival.



>> Unlike victims of spousal abuse, for example, no civil remedies exist for those seeking relief in a dating relationship. House Bill 8 in the 2014 legislative session would have provided those remedies, but the bill died before it could become law. According to a map provided by the Mary Byron Project, Kentucky is the only state in America that provides no protection to victims of dating violence who have not lived with or had a child with their abuser.

"At this point, officers can't arrest for violation of an Emergency Protective Order, because there is no protective order available to dating victims," said Marcia Roth, executive director of the Mary Byron Project. "That's all the more reason why law enforcement ought to look at these cases and see if they can creatively, within the law, figure out a way for criminal sanctions."

Protective orders are an important missing tool because obtaining one is a first step for many domestic violence victims, Faragher said. They don't have to put anyone in jail or endure the social stigma that results from their partner's arrest.

"Very few victims, when they're ready to take that first step, are thinking about punishing the abuser," Faragher said. "That's not where their head's at. They just want the abuse to stop. So the protective order is such a nice way of doing that. Of course, they've already tried saying, 'Stop, don't do this.' Maybe even making their own threats of saying, 'I'll tell someone,' or, 'I'll call the police.' But when none of that has worked, they get that protective order."

When a victim of dating violence files a criminal complaint against her abuser, she has no control over what happens next, Bartlett said.

"She is not a party to the action," Bartlett said. "The party is the Commonwealth of Kentucky. She doesn't have any control over the process. A prosecutor may decline to prosecute the case for a lack of evidence, they may settle the case for nothing, or they may plead it down. If she gets a no-contact order out of the criminal court, it is only punishable by contempt of court, which means the victim has to go back to court if her abuser violates the order."

"The civil order (if it was available to her) protects her while this process is taking place," Bartlett continued, "and she's in charge of it. She is the party, and it continues to protect her if the criminal

prosecution gets dropped for whatever reason. If he violates the order, it is one of only two times in Kentucky law that mandatory arrest exists."

Bearing in mind that signs of abusive behavior start young, Roth suggested a behavior-changing impact can be made with perpetrators by filing the EPO without potentially ruining their future.

"From the male perspective, if that person is served with a protective order and is told in language he can understand that this is not OK, that he cannot continue this behavior, you might well be preventing him from ending up as a guest in one of Kentucky's jails," she said.

For example, an 18-year-old perpetrator might be charged with stalking, trespassing, burglary, assault, or a variety of other criminal charges for abuse he inflicts on his girlfriend. With his adult life just starting, Bartlett said he — and his parents — would rather him be subject to a civil protective order. If he complies with the terms of the order, he has no criminal record, she said.

"Going forth into college and the job market, he doesn't have that on his record," Bartlett said. "He learns at 18 that the behavior is wrong. Then he's not still doing it when he's 30 or 45 when he's losing his job, can't support his kids, he's going to jail...."

"And we've got victims out the wazoo," Roth added.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Until the day comes that protective orders are available to Kentucky dating victims, Faragher said it is imperative that we focus on remedies that ARE available to victims.

"It's time to start being more public about what victims of dating violence can do to get help," Faragher said. "I feel like by focusing on the protective order statute, we've almost given the message that there is no help for dating-violence victims. It's like everything we do — it is one tool in the tool box. I think it is a very important tool, and I hope we get it soon. But it is not the only thing we can do. All of us, then, should be focusing on what we can do for victims. What help is available for them?"

Support and advocacy from multiple organizations are available and active. The National Dating Violence Hotline, for example, is available 24 hours a day, seven

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days a week in 140 languages, she said. If your agency has a relationship with local advocates, provide their information to dating victims, Faragher said, along with hotline numbers.

"So if somebody from Lexington called, they are going to tell them about Greenhouse 17 (an organization devoted to support, counseling, advocacy, emergency shelter, education and prevention reaching 17 central-Kentucky counties)," Faragher said. "They call me once in a while just to make sure my information is correct. They are very good about trying to keep on top of resources nationally."

Criminal avenues that exist for all domestic violence victims are the same in cases of dating violence, Faragher said. Trespassing, stalking, assault, terroristic threatening, burglary, harassing communications — all are common charges that can be levied, when appropriate, in dating violence cases.

Given the propensity for violence among young adults, Roth suggested bullying as a charge that should be considered. Even if it is relationship violence, it is still bullying, Bartlett reiterated.

"What law enforcement has to understand is that the relationship does not excuse the behavior," Bartlett said. "If you would charge strangers with burglary because they broke into someone's home and took their cell phone to see their text messages, you need to charge the ex-boyfriend. Sometimes people tend to think the relationship excuses the behavior. If it wouldn't excuse it in a stranger situation, it doesn't excuse it in a dating relationship. The risk of physical injury or death is still the same."

"Whether or not you live with somebody doesn't determine your risk," Bartlett continued. "The relationship determines your risk. A compassionate, thoughtful law enforcement agent should say to

themselves, 'This girl can't get a protective order. Let me see what I can do to keep her safe.' Because she is still in danger."

What's unique in dating violence cases — as it would be in other domestic violence cases — is establishing context, Faragher said.

"These are crimes where context is critical," she said. "You have to consider the context to understand the meaning of the incident. It's really about the officer's line of questioning and making sure they are talking to the victim privately. They need to ask questions that get at what the relationship may be. 'Are you just friends? Is there more than a friendship here? How long has the relationship been going on? Has there been some kind of change?'"

Most critically, Faragher said, is asking what victims fear their abuser may do.

"Not that they are going to base a charge on that exactly, but this is going to bring out where their head is with this relationship," she continued. "You may say something like, 'This isn't what happened this time, but can you tell me about the worst thing that's ever happened? What is the worst thing this person has ever done to you?'"

Giving victims the message that many people are hurt by someone in dating relationships and there are resources available, even if there are no charges that can be brought at that point, is imperative.

"I think an officer giving that message that we do have laws to protect them, that's a good start," Faragher said. "At least the victim has gotten the message that this isn't OK, our society says it's not OK and there is help out there for them."

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# Could it be possible to have fewer victims of sexual assault?

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In 2008, the Kentucky Association of Sexual Assault Programs joined together with 13 regional rape crisis centers in an effort to reduce sexual violence, dating violence, stalking and bullying among the population they considered to be most at risk — 14 to 18 year olds. From 2009 to 2014, KASAP and the University of Kentucky collected data in a randomized controlled intervention trial to evaluate Green Dot intervention programs via surveys conducted in 28 Kentucky high schools. Nearly 100,000

students were surveyed, making this one of the largest surveys of its kind. There were three study goals. Surveyors wanted to determine if, when compared with students in control schools, students in schools with Green Dot reported:

- more positive bystander behaviors
- fewer social norms supporting violence acceptance
- lower rates of violence over time with the program's implementation

Half of the schools surveyed were considered implementation schools where

Green Dot speeches and bystander training was conducted. The other half were control schools, where no new programs addressing sexual assault were implemented during this time. Green Dot was implemented in two phases: Green Dot persuasive speeches began in fall 2010 and five hour Peer Opinion Leader Bystanding training began in fall 2011. The survey included 99 questions. Students were surveyed every spring over the course of the five-year study.

## BIG PICTURES QUESTIONS

Was the **training** implemented and does it have **impact on students**? Does **training result in a reduction of violence over time**?

The answer: Yes

- By spring 2014 **more than 14 percent** of students in intervention schools reported **receiving Green Dot bystander training**. (Research shows that at least 15 percent of selected students in any school — or community — must engage in the new behavior to achieve the shift the program aims for. Thus, student leaders were selected from 15 percent of the total population within schools.)
- Survey results showed **acceptance of sexual violence declined** significantly.
- **Acceptance of dating violence also declined** among intervention school surveyed students.
- **Bystander behaviors increased significantly** in intervention schools, surveyed students reported.

“The simple interpretation is that Green Dot works to reduce sexual violence perpetration and victimization. Other forms of violence also are similarly affected.”  
— KASAP Executive Director Eileen Recktenwald

## Green Dot Philosophy

The Green Dot etc. curriculum is informed by concepts and lessons learned from bodies of research and theory across disciplines including: violence against women, diffusion of innovation, public health, social networking, psychology, communications, bystander dynamics, perpetration and marketing/advertising. Additionally, since the foundation of Green Dot etc. is built upon the necessity of achieving a critical mass of individuals willing to engage in new behaviors, it is important that we strive to recognize and address anything within our efforts that might be limiting engagement including historical obstacles in the field of violence prevention and professional and personal obstacles we all face. Finally, in contrast to historical approaches to violence prevention that have focused on victims and perpetrators, the Green Dot etc. strategy is predicated on the belief that individual safety is a community responsibility and shifts the lens away from victims/perpetrators and onto bystanders. The overarching goal is to mobilize a force of engaged and proactive bystanders.

— [livethegreendot.com](http://livethegreendot.com)

